

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MANAGU 00241 191756Z

ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5417

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY QUITO

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 0241

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, NU

SUBJECT: SOMOZA PRESS CONFERENCE

1. PRESIDENT SOMOZA HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE IN MANAGUA JAN 16 AND ANSWERED QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE ASSASSINATION OF PEDRO J. CHAMORRO AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN THE COUNTRY. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE WERE:

-- AS FAR AS HE KNEW, NO ONE IN THE GOVERNMENT OR PREVIOUSLY IN THE GOVERNMENT WAS INVOLVED IN THE ASSASSINATION, AND IF ANYONE WERE, THE FULL WEIGHT OF THE LAW WOULD FALL ON THAT PERSON.

-- AS LONG AS THE AUTHORITIES DISCOVER WHO THE GUILTY PARTIES ARE, THE ASSASSINATION WILL HAVE NO IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY, BECAUSE IT WAS AN ISOLATED CRIME THAT HAD NOTHING TO WITH POLITICS.

-- HE WOULD CONTINUE TO GOVERN NICARAGUA UNTIL HIS MANDATE COMES TO AN END IN 1981, AND THAT WHETHER HE WOULD CONTINUE TO BE CHIEF OF THE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MANAGU 00241 191756Z

NATIONAL GUARD (AFTER 1981) WOULD DEPEND ON THE DECISION OF THE NEXT PRESIDENT. (AT A PREVIOUS PRESS CONFERENCE ON JAN 14, SOMOZA STATED THAT HE WOULD RETIRE FROM THE PRESIDENCY IN 1981, BUT WOULD NOT GIVE UP HIS QUOTE, CITIZEN'S RIGHTS, UNQUOTE. HE ALSO STATED THAT HE WOULD NOT WANT HIS SON, MAJ. ANASTASION SOMOZA PORTOCARRERO, TO BECOME PRESIDENT OF NICARAGUA.)

-- THE LIBERAL PARTY CONTINUES TO BE READY TO ENTER INTO A DIALOGUE WITH OTHER GROUPS, AND IF CHAMORRO'S FOLLOWERS DO NOT WISH TO ENTER INTO A DIALOGUE, IT WOULD BE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY. SOMOZA ALSO SAID THAT HE WOULD EVEN DIALOGUE WITH THE NATIONAL SANDINIST LIBERATION FRONT (FSLN), IF THE FSLN LAYS DOWN ITS ARMS.

-- WITH REGARD TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY (PCN) MIGHT REQUEST A POSTPONEMENT OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR FEB 1978, HE IMPLIED THAT THE LIBERAL PARTY WOULD NOT COOPERATE WITH SUCH A CHANGE. HE ALSO SAID THAT IF THE PCN WERE TO DECIDE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS "IT WOULD BE THE BEST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN TO THIS COUNTRY, BECAUSE THE WAY WOULD THEN BE OPEN FOR OTHER GROUPS TO PETITION (FOR LEGAL STATUS) AND THEY (THE PCN) WOULD BE REPLACED IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION."

2. COMMENT: THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS ARE IN EFFECT UNCOMPROMISING IN THAT NO NEW CONCESSIONS WERE OFFERED TO THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION. HOWEVER, FOR THE FIRST TIME SOMOZA PUBLICLY STATED HIS INTENTION TO RETIRE FROM THE PRESIDENCY AT THE END OF HIS TERM, INDICATED THAT HE DID NOT WANT HIS SON TO SUCCEED HIM AND ACKNOWLEDGED THE UNCONSTITUTIONALITY OF SUCH A MANEUVER. BUT, SOMOZA CLEARLY LEFT THE DOOR OPEN TO HIS CONTINUING TO SERVE AS CHIEF DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL

GUARD, THE TRADITIONAL ROUTE OF SOMOZA CONTINUITY IN CONTROLLING THE REGIME DURING PERIODS OF NON-SOMOZA PRESIDENTS. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS SUGGESTS HE IS PRESENTING A TOUGH PUBLIC
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MANAGU 00241 191756Z

FRONT, AND AVOIDING ANY CONCESSIONS WHICH MIGHT BE INTERPRETED AS A SIGN OF FURTHER WEAKENING OF HIS POSITION. HIS BLUNT PUBLIC WARNING TO THE CONSERVATIVES THAT IF THEY BOYCOTT THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS THE GON WOULD TAKE AWAY THEIR LEGAL STATUS AND GIVE IT TO A MORE ACCOMMODATING GROUP IS PROBABLY DESIGNED TO KEEP THE OPPOSITION DIVIDED. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PCN IN THE ELECTIONS WOULD LIKELY MAINTAIN THE ANTI-PATHY OF OTHER OPPOSITIONISTS TOWARD THEM AND IMPEDE EFFORTS TOWARD A UNITED OPPOSITION FRONT.
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